

Data Sources

Annual Survey of Manufactures. The U.S. Bureau of the Census conducts this survey of a sample of manufacturing establishments each year. It is the most comprehensive source of information about U.S. manufacturing shipments, cost of materials, value added, wages, employment, and capital expenditures. The most recent published data available at time of publication was from 1995. These data are available for detailed (four-digit SIC) industries, but little or no regional detail is usually available. However, ERS has obtained special tabulations of metro and nonmetro totals for years 1989 through 1994. Nonmetro manufacturing statistics are obtained from these special tabulations.

County Business Patterns. The U.S. Bureau of the Census publishes an annual series, the County Business Patterns, that provides estimates of employment, establishments, and payroll by industry for each U.S. county. These data are the most comprehensive source of information on geographic patterns of employment for detailed industries. The Census Bureau does not publish data that could disclose information about the operations of individual companies or establishments. To account for these confidential data, ERS uses an enhanced County Business Patterns file (acquired from a private vendor) that imputes values for the suppressed data. Employees totally exempt from the Federal Insurance Contribution Act (farm operators and other self-employed persons, hired farm workers, most government employees, railroad workers, and domestic service workers) are not counted by County Business Patterns.

The Rural Manufacturing Survey. ERS, in cooperation with Washington State University, conducted a nationwide survey of rural manufacturing businesses in 1996 to evaluate problems that affect their competitiveness. The Rural Manufacturing Survey provides extensive information on 2,844 nonmetro establishments and 1,065 metro establishments with 10 or more employees representing all manufacturing industries. All statistics reported are weighted for stratification of the sample. The questions covered technology use, labor skills and training, marketing assistance, locational barriers to competitiveness, and sources of financing. The goal of the survey was to investigate issues of rural manufacturing competitiveness and enhance the targeting of rural development programs at national, State, and local levels.

Macroeconomic Data. The economic indicators used to monitor macroeconomic changes in the U.S. economy are derived from Federal sources. Measures of inflation, including the consumer and producer prices indexes, productivity, employment cost, and employment and unemployment data are developed by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Energy prices are from the Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy. National income and product account information on capital investment, gross domestic product, and net exports is produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), U.S. Department of Commerce. Information relating to monetary policy including changes in interest rates and foreign exchange rates, and data on industrial production are furnished by the Federal Reserve Board.

Employment Data. Data on metro and nonmetro employment and unemployment reported in this issue come from three sources. The monthly Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, provides detailed information on the labor force, employment, unemployment, and demographic characteristics of the metro and nonmetro population. The CPS derives estimates based on interviews of a national sample of about 47,000 households that are representative of the U.S. civilian noninstitutional population 16 years of age and over. Labor force information is based on respondents' activity during 1 week each month. Among the data products of the CPS are the monthly files, the earnings microdata files, and the March Annual Demographic Supplement (known as the March CPS).

BLS county-level employment data, the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), are taken from unemployment insurance claims and State surveys of established payrolls which are then benchmarked to State totals from the CPS. The BLS data series provides monthly estimates of labor force, employment, and unemployment for individual counties.

BEA employment data, unlike the household data collected by the CPS and BLS, provide establishment data on the number of jobs rather than the number of workers. The BEA data are taken primarily from administrative reports filed by employers covered under unemployment insurance laws and from information from the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security Administration. Thus, jobs and earnings for these jobs are counted at the place of work and are based on a virtual universal count rather than a sample. The BEA data provide detailed information on the number of jobs and amount of earnings by industry at the county level. A shortcoming of the BEA data is the 2-year lag between when they are collected and when they are available for analysis.

Each of these data sets has its advantages and disadvantages. The CPS furnishes detailed employment, unemployment, and demographic data for metro and nonmetro portions of the Nation. The LAUS provides less detailed employment data than the CPS, but offers very current employment and unemployment information at the county level. The BEA provides estimates of the number of jobs and earnings by industry for individual county areas. While these data sources are likely to provide different estimates of employment conditions at any point in time, they generally indicate similar trends over time.